

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Background

The Iowa State Capitol "Engineer's House" was constructed with state revenues at the same time the Capitol was being built. It sat near the "boiler house," later known as the power plant, just north of the Capitol across from Grand Avenue. At the time of the Capitol's construction, Grand Avenue was known as "Sycamore." Capitol Commissioners' reports make no mention of the construction of the Engineer's House, but it is referred to in reports regarding the heating and ventilation of the Capitol.

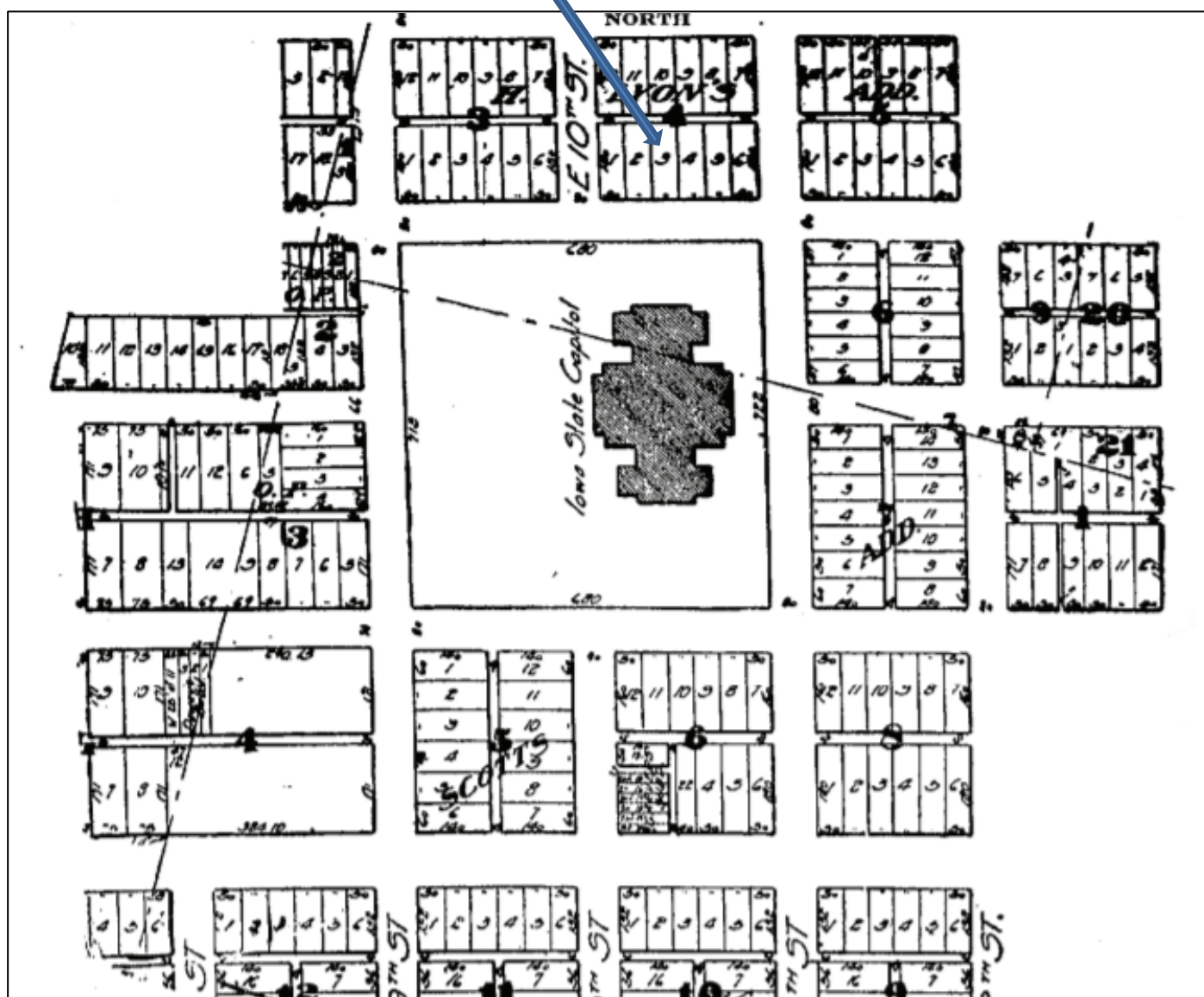


The "Engineer's House" appears to be a beautiful home.

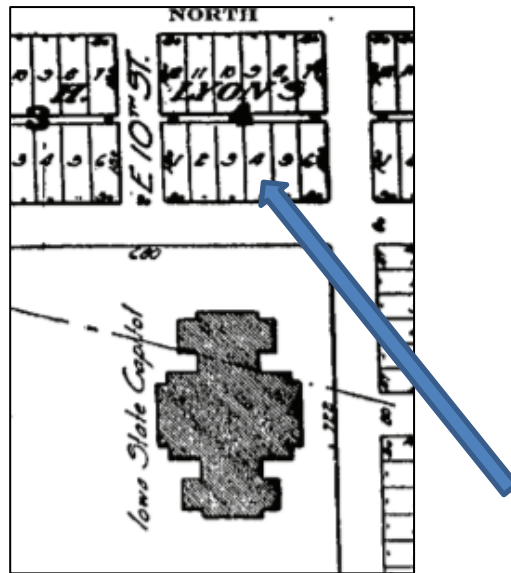
Capitol Commissioners' Reports

The 1880 Commissioners' reports include the purchase of the first lot for the steam heating works.

the same meeting and under the provisions of the same section, the Board purchased lot number three, block number four, of Lyon's addition, on which to locate the steam heating works. The amount paid for this lot was \$1,408.50.



After having the plans prepared for heating and ventilating the new Capitol it was thought advisable to have more room for the works than the ground heretofore purchased would afford, and the Commissioners purchased for the State the lot adjoining on the east, of John M. Day, for the sum of seventeen hundred and twenty-five (1,725) dollars. This enabled them to build the boiler-house of the required width and to have ample room for light, and drive-ways on either side.



REALTY ACQUIRED BY THE STATE FOR PUBLIC USES AND PURPOSES—CONTINUED.

INSTITUTION.	DESCRIPTION.	Section.	Town.	Range.	Acres.	GRANTOR.	Nature of deed.	Date of deed.	When filed for record.
State Heat. House.	Lot 3, block 4, H. Lyon's add. to the town of De Moines. Lot 4, block 4, H. Lyon's addition to the city of Des Moines.....	..	..	..	..	Ed Wright, widower. Jno. M. Day and Jennie E. Day, his wife	Warr'ty.	April 5, 1878	April 6, 1878
North of State Heating House..	Lots 9 and 10, block 4, H. Lyon's addition to the city of Des Moines.....	..	..	..	..	John V. Wise, ex'r of John H. Wise estate	Warr'ty.	June 17, 1880	June 19, 1880
State Arsenal.....	Lots 1 and 2, block 7, of Scott's addition to the city of Des Moines.....	..	..	..	..	John V. Wise, ex'r of John H. Wise estate Flora Wright.....	Ex'r's... Warr'ty.	April 23, 1894	April 27, 1894
Historical building	Lots 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, in block 5, H. Lyon's addition to the city of Des Moines..... The consideration paid by the state, \$15,000.	..	..	..	..	Eliza Jane Lyon.....	Warr'ty.	June 9, 1897 June 13, 1898	

Capitol Commissioners' Reports

The 1880 report of the Steam-Heating Engineer includes details for the tunnel to run under Grand Avenue and connect the Capitol to the boiler house.

The location for the Boiler House I find to be across Sycamore street, 220 feet distant to the front or nearest side of the lot. In order to connect with the building, it will be necessary to construct a Tunnel or Duct, of sufficient size for the several lines of pipes for steam and return water, with room to take proper care of them; and I should recommend that this duct be made large enough to be used for the main supply of fresh air for the building, for several reasons:

The 1882 Commissioners' report states the Engineer's House has been built but is not yet finished on the interior.

The heating works, consisting of boiler and coal-house, pump-room, engineer's house, ventilating tower, smoke-stack, and tunnel connecting heating works with the Capitol, have been built, with the exception of the interior finish to the engineer's house. The roof of the boiler and coal-house is an iron frame covered with porous terra cotta and slate similar to the roof of the Capitol.

The Capitol Commissioners' final report in 1886 estimates the cost of finishing the Capitol, including the amount necessary to finish the interior of the Engineer's House.

The only regret the members of the Board feel is that the financial situation of the State was such that the legislature was unable to make the small appropriation required to finish the building. Their estimates showed that it required to finish the

Engineer's house	\$ 872.00
Frescoing halls, corridors, etc.....	11,800.00
Putting up steps, pointing walls, etc....	16,015.00
Finishing under steps.....	650.00
Total.....	\$ 29,387.00

With the Capitol completed, the general maintenance, including heating and ventilation, was assigned to the Custodian of Public Buildings and Property. The 1890 Custodian's report requests appropriations for completing the Engineer's House.

Subsequent

Custodian's reports through 1898 do not mention the Engineer's House or if it was ever completed.



All the corridors, all the committee rooms, all the offices on the basement floor, and the five unfinished rooms on the office story, should be painted or frescoed at the earliest possible day. An appropriation of \$25,000 should be made for that purpose, and for completing the engineer's house. An appropriation of \$150,000, one third to be used during each of the years 1890, 1891 and 1892, will be sufficient to complete the building, the engineer's house, and improve the grounds as proposed by the plans of Mr. Weidenmann, and reported by the capitol commissioners.

In the early 1900s, a fourth Capitol Commission was formed and charged with decorating the public spaces of the Capitol and overseeing needed repairs.

In the first biennial report of this Commission, members discuss changing the location of a fireproof warehouse "in front" of the existing heating plant. This warehouse was designed by architect Oliver Smith, who also designed the Historical, Memorial, and Arts Building to the east.

It is believed that the Engineer's House existed from about 1881 until about 1904. There is no record of the interior ever being completed. The Executive Council proceedings for 1903 note that on February 27, the "custodian is authorized to remove old building from site for storage building" and on November 7, 1903, ". . . order entered for removal of all documents now stored in State House to new warehouse."

However, Executive Council records show the contract for the paper warehouse was not approved until April 16, 1907.

April 16, 1907—Contract executed with Bolton Transfer Company for drayage and cartage for state departments. Contract made with Smith, Wetherell & Gage for plans, specifications and supervision in the construction of paper warehouse, on basis of three per cent of cost. Said architects were directed to ask for bids for construction of the same. Architect O. O. Smith directed to prepare additional necessary plans for completion of Historical Building and ask for bids.



Oliver O. Smith
Architect

From the Capitol Commissioners' report in 1902:

A fireproof warehouse had been recommended at a cost of \$16,000.00. This estimate was based upon a location a block distant from the Capitol. Upon taking up this branch of our work, however, it was by the executive council, as well as ourselves, deemed important to place this warehouse opposite the Capitol and in front of the existing heating plant. In this location it would be available for document storage and for other purposes contemplated, to a much greater extent than otherwise.

The basement could also be used for the installation of a large part of the mechanical equipment made necessary in connection with the heating, lighting, and ventilating system to be installed. On account of the advance in materials and labor the structure would doubtless have cost \$20,000.00 in the location adopted by the preliminary commission, but owing to the change in architecture, made necessary by the location in proximity to the Capitol, the cost was increased to the contract price of \$28,465.00, \$12,465.00 more than the original estimate.

1913 Panoramic North View from the Iowa State Capitol



*Original panoramic photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines
Electronically tinted: Legislative Services Agency*

This panoramic photo shows the paper warehouse in the center, after the Engineer's House had been removed.